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KALAMAZOO CAREER OFFENDER SENTENCED

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – Whitney Atkinson, 35, of Kalamazoo, a career offender, was sentenced yesterday to 20 years in prison for being a felon in possession of a firearm and carrying a firearm during a drug trafficking crime, U.S. Attorney Charles R. Gross announced today.

Atkinson pled guilty on May 15, 2007, to being a convicted felon in possession of a loaded .45 caliber handgun and carrying said firearm while in possession of over 6 grams of cocaine base (crack cocaine) intended for distribution. Atkinson was indicted by a federal grand jury on Feb. 7, 2007, following a traffic stop of Atkinson's vehicle in Kalamazoo, Michigan. During the traffic stop, Atkinson, who is a twice-convicted felon and had been on parole for only three months, was found carrying a loaded Hi Point .45 caliber semiautomatic handgun in his waistband. During a subsequent search incident to arrest, officers located two plastic bags containing over 6 grams of crack cocaine in Atkinson's pocket.

In addition to 240 months in prison, Chief U.S. District Judge Robert Holmes Bell ordered Atkinson to serve three years of supervised release and pay a \$1,000 fine and \$200 in special assessments.

U.S. Attorney Gross commended the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety (KDPS) for their work in the case. Their joint investigation was undertaken as part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative. This case was prosecuted on behalf of the United States of America by Assistant U.S. Attorney Elisa Castrolugo.

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